

Considerations on escape and revolt

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It would be interesting to comment on the last two escape attempts from high security prisons: the first one was carried out by helicopter from the prison of Trikala, the second one by a 'little lie' from the prison of Malandrino.

In the first case police did not hesitate to consolidate the doctrine of zero tolerance and put the life of dozens of people at risk. Police just wanted to avoid an escape, an offence that is considered minor...

In the second case we saw what a prisoner can achieve if he wields a simple radio as if it was a bomb (!): the authority knows he does not play with his freedom. Even if he did not manage to escape in the end, he held a whole prison in check for 24 hours using his determination as his only weapon.

But what is remarkable in these two cases is the change of the meaning of escape, which is now the individual trajectory of a prisoner. Up to the end of the nineties rebellion and escape were two concepts almost linked to each other. Revolt was usually the result of a mass escape attempt. Prisoners tried to escape together, some were successful, others were wounded by the cops' bullets during the attempt and those who were left came back to the prison and put it to fire. The reasons for this change have to be found on the one hand in the new technology and architecture of repression, on the other hand in the unprecedented individualism of today's prisoners.

Modern prisons are devised to achieve as much control as possible relying on material and electronic methods: cameras are placed in every corner, wings can be looked up and down, doors open electronically only from the control room. Another important detail is the roof, the main refuge of rebel prisoners, which today is totally inaccessible.

Moreover the prison population has changed, which in turns produced a change in the perception of prisoners.

Today's prison population is not made of bloodthirsty criminals or romantic outlaws. It is mainly made of migrants coming from Africa and Asia, who quite often don't know not only the language but also the reason why they are in prison, drug addicts who should be in hospital, petty thieves terrorized by their debtors: this is the new tendency in Greek prisons. There are also nightlife godfathers and henchmen who, in exchange for small favours, keep a balance between corruption and social peace in the Greek prisons.

Relations among prisoners are false, disgustingly hypocritical or just diplomatic. There exists a game of domination that acts as a brake on the construction of trustful relations, and this reduces the combative mood requiring solidarity. As they are divided according to nations and tribes, light or heavy sentences for the most various offences, personal differences due to drug or personal interests, prisoners are destroying any sense of community of struggle which could be created.

As a result, those who want to affirm their freedom are invited to try alone or with a few friends. Collective solutions look like obsolete romanticism belonging to the nineties.

Why is this important?

Because prison is a mirror of society. It is the place where its functions, values, traditions, ethics and problems are concentrated. If we analyze what happens inside, we can interpret the social inertia of the outside.

Helicopters used to escape are spectacular and right, but the flames of rebellion are much better. Those who escaped successfully or just tried to escape are worth respect but we should not forget that our goal is not only to fly over the prison walls but also to dance on their debris.

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Wing E1 of Domokos prison

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